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THE PHILOSOPHY OF GEORGES COURTELINE

A FRAGMENT

A PHYSICIAN exerts upon me a double influence which I can not overcome: he frightens me, and he does not reassure me.

If he says to me: "You have such or such a malady," I believe him; but if he says: "I will cure you," I do not believe him.

One begins to wonder if the universal obstinacy of physicians in systematically depriving their patients of all they care most for; the ferocious joy they evidently feel in crying to him: "No smoking! No alcohol! No coffee!—Water! Water! Water!"—is not a form of abnormal delight in cruelty.

It is absurd for physicians to impose on a stomach, under the pretext of easy digestion, dishes which it detests and consequently refuses.

It is as if they should wish to force a man, interested in the opposite sex, to make love to an old woman, ugly, dried-up, lame, and blear-eyed, under the pretext of "expediency."

He would be a rascal who, knowing the precise location among the lobes of the brain, the cell of the will, should fertilize and develop it by some secret process; for the victim would die, not only of blood-poisoning, of pleurisy or congestion, but also of his own powerlessness to avoid self-control and of the sharp suffering which he would endure in breaking off habits he well knew to be injurious.

He would die of giving up bridge among the clouds of a smoky card-room and not repeating every evening,—

"My word! I had no idea it was so late! This is the last rubber! Whose deal?"

He would die of not saying to himself: "I have had eight bocks! It is too many. One more, waiter! It is the last."

He would die of not saying: "Hullo! No more tobacco! I limit my smoking to twenty cents a day, you know; who has a cigarette?"

The small practitioner is preferable to the great, because he is less to be feared. Outside the pale of Ideas, he has no temptation to employ them willy nilly, while the other tranquilly experiments with his, up to the moment when a succession of fads and failures opens his eyes to the immensity of an error which he had taken for a truth.

However, I am convinced that the application of serums, of surgical methods, and prophylactic measures will end by being the winners, and that the day will come, in the near future perhaps, when all that men will know of illness will be the delight of no longer being menaced by it. And from this instant—Death, having no intention of abdicating his rights,—every one will die a sudden death. One will never know, on going to bed, whether he will wake on the next morning, or on rising whether he will live to go to bed that night.

This will be a little annoying, but in the long run every one will get used to it, and it will serve the clever ones as a pretext for declining invitations to dine at houses where the table is indifferent.